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FM AMEMBASSY RABAT
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 3310
INFO RUEHAS/AMEMBASSY ALGIERS IMMEDIATE 3877
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON IMMEDIATE 2870
RUEHMD/AMEMBASSY MADRID IMMEDIATE 5439
RUEHMK/AMEMBASSY NOUAKCHOTT IMMEDIATE 3097
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS IMMEDIATE 4122
RUEHTU/AMEMBASSY TUNIS IMMEDIATE 8762
RUEHCL/AMCONSUL CASABLANCA IMMEDIATE 1505
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK IMMEDIATE 0490
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHINGTON DC IMMEDIATE

C O N F I D E N T I A L RABAT 000616

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STATE FOR NEA/MAG, DRL

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/05/2011

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [UN](#) [PBTS](#) [PHUM](#) [MO](#)

SUBJECT: SEVENTEEN ACTIVISTS IN THE WESTERN SAHARA: BEATEN
OR NOT?

REF: A. RABAT 00539
[1](#)B. RABAT 00558

Classified By: Pol/C Timothy A. Lenderking, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: On April 3, seventeen Sahrawi prisoners were brought to court from Laayoune prison for their trials. According to the Polisario website and Sahrawi activist Brahim Afari who called Polcouns April 4, the prisoners were "severely beaten" in vans on the way to the court. One activist indicated that Brahim Dahane, the leader of a nongovernmental organization, was beaten twice. There have been no Moroccan press accounts of events in Laayoune and GOM officials will not confirm the events. At present there is no objective observer in Laayoune to confirm or deny the reports. MINURSO has said they have no hard facts. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (SBU) On April 3, seventeen Sahrawi prisoners were taken from the Laayoune prison to court in vans. Upon arrival at the courthouse, it was evident that the seventeen had been beaten in the vans, according to contacts and the Polisario's Sahara Presse Service. Family members who were waiting at the court were reportedly shocked by the prisoners' conditions. The judge postponed the trial until April 25, reportedly on the grounds that lawyers for the accused requested an investigation into the alleged abuse. The seventeen prisoners are: Brahim Dahane, Idrissi Bouda, Athman Atnakha, Louchaa Bahiya, Haddi Lehbib, Machkour Bachir, Injourni Salilamou, Labras Majoub, Targui Malainin, Echain Mborik, Ait Abeilou Mbarek, Leghazal Hamou, Amaidan Mauloud, Labras Mbarek, Ismaili Mbarek, Tanji Daha, and Sidi Sayelli.

[1](#)3. (SBU) The most well-known of the prisoners is Brahim Dahane, who was arrested on October 30, 2005 during a demonstration in Laayoune (and a few days after a meeting with emboffs). Dahane is the president of an unofficial (according to the GOM) nongovernmental organization, the Sahrawi Association of Victims of Grave Human Rights Violations Committed by the Moroccan State. According to two other members of this NGO, Mohammed Daha (protect) and Brahim Afari (protect), the prisoners were beaten by "Le GUS," one of the divisions of Securitie Nationale, or "the urban security group." These two sources said that the prisoners were dressed in Sahrawi robes, chanting and raising the peace sign before they boarded the vans at the prison. The

representative of the Moroccan Association of Human Rights (AMDH), which generally takes a tough line against the GOM, also told Polles that the prisoners were beaten. The prisoners' lawyers filed a grievance with the court; the grievance was denied.

14. (SBU) Afari's account of the events focused on Dahane, whom he said was beaten twice: first in the van and then again at the courthouse. Dahane, according to Afari, refused to be searched when he entered the courthouse. Dahane was then separated from the other prisoners, taken to a waiting room and beaten again. Activist Daha, in turn, told Polles that he works at Laayoune Hospital and that Dahane arrived at the hospital covered in blood. Dahane had cuts and bruises on his face and head. According to Daha, another activist spent the night in the hospital because his leg had been broken. Other detainees were injured as well, Daha claimed, and received medical treatment and were returned to the prison. Daha asked that an embassy official observe the trial when it resumes on April 25. Afari indicated that Sahrawis are deeply concerned over the incidents and suspect that the prisoners will be beaten again on April 25. He too requested embassy support.

15. (SBU) Luis DeVega (protect), a Spanish journalist based in Morocco, who takes a hard line against the GOM, told Polcouns April 6 that he had talked to people in Laayoune who had seen the detainees arrive at court "bloodied." He was clear to say that no one he had spoken to had actually witnessed the beatings, but he had no doubt that a number of the detainees (he was not sure how many) had been beaten.

The GOM Perspective

16. (C) Poloff contacted Brahim Bouabid, Counselor at the MOJ, on April 4 concerning the beatings. Bouabid, normally very helpful to the mission, had no information and initially said that "all of the people who would handle this issue are out of the country today." Calling back later, he wanted to know from whom Poloff had received the information about the beatings. Bouabid discounted the website as a source and said that the truth was not being told. Similarly, Secretary General of the Wilayat of Laayoune Hamid Chariai, whom Polcouns contacted by phone the afternoon of April 6, said there was no way the detainees were beaten but offered no alternative explanation of events.

17. (C) Polcouns also spoke with the Director of General Affairs in the Wali of Laayoune's office, Mr. Younes. Mr. Younes did not provide any information directly but promised to get the embassy answers if the embassy would provide a letter detailing exactly what it wished to know. Polcouns faxed a letter to Mr. Younes requesting information concerning the veracity of the above reports the afternoon of April 6. We will report any response septel.

18. (C) At the conclusion of a meeting with the Ambassador on April 6 in Rabat (septel), Polcouns asked SRSB Bastagli and MINURSO Political Officer Carmen Johns if they had any information on the situation. Bastagli said MINURSO was aware of the reports but had no hard facts.

Comment

19. (C) Assessing the validity of the beatings becomes a "he said - she said" game. It is impossible to verify the stories without an objective observer being present in Laayoune, that is someone who had access to the prisoners prior to the trial date, who saw them before arrival at the courthouse and after their arrival. If only partially true, the GOM is disregarding its own best interests as this type of press, in light of the 2005 events in the Western Sahara, can only serve to tarnish Morocco's international reputation.

"Human rights are fine if one is not an outspoken Sahrawi" is the message being conveyed.

¶10. (C) These allegations also come at an awkward time for Morocco -- as the newly revamped Council for Saharan Affairs (CORCAS) concludes its first meeting in Rabat, as Morocco continues to express publicly its determination to grant a wide autonomy to citizens of the Western Sahara, as the Security Council prepares to release its report on the Western Sahara, and as the UN Commission for Human Rights continues to be turned away by Morocco from looking at the human rights situation in the Western Sahara. Thus far the GOM has done nothing publicly to refute or acknowledge the allegations of the activists being beaten. Of course, with all of the international attention focused on the Western Sahara, those who reject Moroccan control over the Sahara have every incentive to keep the pot boiling at this particular time.

¶11. (C) If the Ministry of Interior is serious about a human rights dialogue, then this issue is precisely the type they should be discussing with the embassy (reftel B).

¶12. (SBU) Post will report further information septel.

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<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/nea/rabat>

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